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ABSTRACT

Utilizing three different techniques, a follow-up survey of participants in a vocational education course was conducted to determine which technique collects the most useful information efficiently. The course participants were divided into thirds and, using the same questionnaire, data was collected from each third via one of the following three techniques: (1) a mail-out questionnaire, (2) personal interviews, and (3) telephone interviews. It was found that the personal interviews by phone and visitation, although introducing a bias, gave the best and most useful information. Control over the question responses was lost by mailing the questionnaire. People tended to leave all the open-ended questions blank and sometimes responded incompletely or incorrectly to the other multiple choice questions. This suggests that the personal interview is the best technique if subjective information and open-ended responses are being sought, but that the mail-out technique is more useful when collecting objective types of data. Also, it was found that the visitation personal interview, although costly, did not give much more information than the telephone interviews. (This report outlines the general procedure, strengths, and weaknesses for each of the three techniques. The questionnaire, a sample script for a telephone interview, and a follow-up letter to non-respondents are appended.) (EM)

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ED166434

INSERVICE FOR VOCATIONAL INSTRUCTORS IN SERVING SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS - A COURSE FOLLOW-UP STUDY.

PROJECT REPORT

by: Tim Wentling
Laurie Peak
Rocco Russo
Terry Jensen

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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CE 019 732

September 1978

RATIONALE

"Following up" on course participants is essential in the development and maintenance of relevant and useful educational courses. But this essential element is often neglected. The reasons for this neglect may be (1) that this exercise is viewed as too time consuming--offering little benefits, and (2) that there exists little support materials to offer guidelines for developing follow-up instruments and effectively analyzing and using the data.

This year the Minnesota Research and Development Center undertook a project to study different approaches to conducting course follow-up studies. Our goals were to determine what is the most effective and efficient way to conduct a follow-up study and to create some guidelines for its development.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the follow-up study project was to develop a follow-up instrument and conduct a follow-up study of the VoEd 5-100 course: "Working with Special Needs Students" using (a) a mail-out questionnaire, (b) personal interviews, and (c) telephone interviews in order to determine which of these three techniques collects the most useful information efficiently.

Products

1. A follow-up study questionnaire
2. A report offering guidelines for conducting future follow-up studies

Procedure

Task 1: Identify existing follow-up instruments and systems

Task 2: Determine the scope of the study

Task 3: Determine the resources and constraints of the study

Task 4: Determine how data will be collected

Task 5: Determine key questions to be answered about the course by the study

Task 6: Develop specific questionnaire questions to be asked for each key question

- Determine type of questions that will be used

Task 7: Divide the class into thirds

Task 8: Conduct phone call interview with one-third of the VoEd 5-100 SS II '77 class

- Have structured interview instrument script prepared and ask questions directly from questionnaire (see Appendix C)

Task 9: Conduct personal interviews with one-third of the VoEd 5-100 SS II '77 class

- Use questionnaire as script

Task 10: Mail out questionnaires to one-third of the VoEd 5-100 SS II '77 class

- Include a cover letter and a stamped and addressed return envelope (see Appendix A and B)

Task 11: Send out second follow-up letter two weeks later to non-responders to the mail questionnaire

- Include a cover letter and a second copy of the questionnaire with a stamped and addressed return envelope (see Appendix D for second follow-up letter)

Task 12: Conduct four-week follow-up phone call requesting the remaining non-respondents to the mail out questionnaire return their questionnaires

Task 13: Tally and annalyze the data collected

Task 14: Determine the strengths and weaknesses of the three different techniques

Task 15: Write project report

RESULTS

In order to conduct this study each staff member used one of the three techniques to follow-up the VoEd 5-100 course. To discribe the results of this project general procedural suggestions, and the strengths and weaknesses found will be listed for each technique. The strengths and weaknesses were identified based upon the staff's experiences using these techniques. This brief outline will provide assistance to others when selecting and designing course follow-up studies:

The Mail-Out Questionnaire Technique

General Procedural Suggestions

1. design and develop questionnaire
2. send out questionnaire with a cover letter explaining the importance and purpose of this study, include a stamped addressed return envelope (see Appendix A and B)
3. two weeks later send out another questionnaire with a second cover letter and a stamped and addressed return envelope to non-respondents (see Appendix D)
4. four to five weeks later call the remaining non-respondents to request that they return one of the two questionnaires they have received

Strengths

- good technique for following-up large groups of people
- most objective technique of the three
- allows for anonymity on the part of the respondent
- can be handled easily by an aid or secretary--does not require as much of the teacher's time as the other two techniques
- least costly of the three techniques

Weaknesses

- assistance cannot be given to respondents on questions they may not understand or on using the questionnaire form itself
- hardest technique for obtaining a 100% response rate
- no control over people deciding not to answer questions as you request them to do or leaving questions blank--thus tallying the questionnaires can be difficult
- can take the longest of the three techniques to complete because two separate mail-outs and a third request by phone may be required (the other two techniques were completed in two weeks while this technique took almost two months to complete)

The Telephone Interview Technique

General Procedural Suggestions

1. develop a questionnaire and/or a script from which to ask questions (see Appendix A and C)
2. develop a formal procedure for identifying who you are, why you are calling, and why you would like them to take ___ minutes (be specific about the time it will require so they can ask you to call them back if they can't spare that much time presently) to answer these questions for you
3. call those to be interviewed at their home between 7:00 and 9:00 at night--this reduces possible interruptions

Strengths

- further information can be given to better explain what questions are being asked
- supplementary information can be obtained about the course and on the questions from comments the interviewee makes and what they say they have

Strengths (Cont.)

done with the information offered and learned in the course

- feedback about student's feelings toward the course and its usefulness to them can be obtained
- allows for discussion between the teacher and former students

Weaknesses

- can be very time consuming and trying for the interviewer
- requires that the teacher do all the work themselves--if aids are used the strengths of this technique are lessened
- introduces a bias by having the teacher personally asking these questions of former students
- can be expensive if long distance calls are necessary
- interviews can get lengthy--people tend to digress and/or talk in generalities about the course, thus it may be hard to keep them on the track and get each question answered specifically as scoring requires

The Personal Interview Technique

General Procedural Suggestions

1. develop a questionnaire and a script for introducing the interviewer and the purpose of the follow-up study (see Appendix A)
2. make telephone contact with each individual to arrange the time and place for interview--emphasis should be placed on the importance of receiving input from each former student--approximately 20 to 30 minutes of time will be needed for the interview
3. travel to pre-arranged interview site
4. conduct interview (NOTE: if the interview is conducted in a school, it would be advisable to go through the administration so that he/she is aware of your presence and purpose)--interviewer completes form as the interview proceeds

Strengths

- able to observe teacher in his/her normal working environment and what he/she has done with information learned in the course
- individual being interviewed can ask questions concerning the interview
- interviewer can help clarify what information is being requested
- interviewer can provide a response for each item--nothing is left unanswered

Weaknesses

- travel may be excessive and costly both in personnel time and transportation costs
- teachers typically do not have sufficient time during the school day to meet for 20 to 30 minutes
- difficult to find adequate meeting facilities without distraction and noise
- teachers are easily distracted by students, other teachers, administrators, bells, and other school activities

RECOMMENDATIONS

The first thing to consider when developing a course follow-up study is what type of information is needed. If the course is new then it is important to get feedback on the teaching techniques used, topics presented, usefulness of course and text materials, appropriateness of course goals and objectives, and both specific and general feelings about the course. At this stage it would probably be very helpful to the teacher to talk with some of the former students to collect this information--or perhaps better yet, visit these students to see what they have done with what they learned from the course. If little is being done with what they learned then this will be the appropriate opportunity to find out why and what can be done to remedy the situation. Thus, a telephone or personal interview technique will likely best meet these information needs.

If the course has existed for a number of years, then the type of follow-up information its teacher needs may only be whether he/she is still using appropriate teaching techniques and whether the concepts being taught are still usable and on target. Thus, an objective mail out questionnaire could be sent to all former students to get an accurate picture of whether the course is still meeting its goals.

This consideration should be the main determinant of the type of technique to use. Other secondary considerations should be as follows:

Consideration	Comment
• the amount of time the teacher can give to this study	• the mail-out takes the least amount of teacher time
• the amount of money that can be spent on this study	• the mail-out technique and local telephone interviews can be inexpensive--personal interviews can be costly in release time and travel

Consideration	Comment
• the number of people to be followed-up	• the mail-out easily handles the most people, but a combination of techniques can also handle a large group of people
• the geographical location of the people to be followed-up	• this affects the cost and feasibility of doing a telephone or personal interview follow-up

Since the same questionnaire was used to "question" each former student in all three techniques in the follow-up study, it was found that the personal interviews by phone and visitation, although they may introduce a bias, still gave the best and most useful information. By mailing the questionnaire control was lost over the question responses. People tended to leave all the open ended questions blank and sometimes responded incompletely or incorrectly to the other multiple choice questions. Thus, this supports the original statement that if subjective information and open ended responses are being sought the personal interview approaches are the best technique. The mail-out technique is useful when collecting objective, yes-no, types of data. Also found in the study was that for the extra cost the visitation did not give much more information than the telephone interviews gave.

APPENDIX A

Name_____ Date_____

Part A.

1. What is your current position? _____
(Job Title)

2. In this position, how many special needs students have you had contact with this school year?

_____
(Number)

3. Who identified these special needs students? (Check all that apply.)

___ a. Myself
___ b. Counselor
___ c. Other Teacher
___ d. Coordinator
___ e. Parents
___ f. Student
___ g. Administrator
___ h. Other_____
(Specify)

Part B. The following series of questions relate to selected topics of the course content.

1. Learner Identification and Development of a Learner Profile and Prescription.

a) Have you implemented these concepts in your program?

Yes___

Do you feel this helped your program?

Yes___

Who did it help?

___Parents
___Student
___Myself
___Other School Personnel

No___

Why not?

___Insufficient Time
___Insufficient Funds
___Insufficient Student Response
___Insufficient Support
_____
(Specify)

No___

Why not? (What were the barriers?)

___1. No Need
___2. Lack of Information
___3. Already Implemented
___4. School Personnel
___5. Money
___6. Time
___7. Other_____
(Specify)

b) How would you rate the course emphasis on this topical area? (circle one)

Too Little 1 Appropriate 2 Too Much 3

2. Developing Cooperative Instructional Arrangements

a) Have you implemented these concepts in your program?

Yes___

Do you feel this helped your program?

Yes___

Who did it help?

___Parents
___Student
___Myself
___Other School Personnel

No___

Why not?

___Insufficient Time
___Insufficient Funds
___Insufficient Student Response
___Insufficient Support

_____
(Specify)

No___

Why not? (What were the barriers?)

___1. No Need
___2. Lack of Information
___3. Already Implemented
___4. School Personnel
___5. Money
___6. Time
___7. Other_____
(Specify)

b) How would you rate the course emphasis on this topical area? (circle one)

Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
1	2	3

3. Developing a Special Needs Resource Inventory

a) Have you implemented these concepts in your program?

Yes___

Do you feel this helped your program?

Yes___

Who did it help?

___Parents
___Student
___Myself
___Other School Personnel

No___

Why not?

___Insufficient Time
___Insufficient Funds
___Insufficient Student Response
___Insufficient Support

_____
(Specify)

No___

Why not? (What were the barriers?)

___1. No Need
___2. Lack of Information
___3. Already Implemented
___4. School Personnel
___5. Money
___6. Time
___7. Other_____
(Specify)

b) How would you rate the course emphasis on this topical area? (circle one)

Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
1	2	3

4. Development of a Special Needs Advisory Committee

a) Have you implemented these concepts in your program?

Yes___

Do you feel this helped your program?

Yes___

Who did it help?

___Parents
___Student
___Myself
___Other School Personnel

No___

Why not?

___Insufficient Time
___Insufficient Funds
___Insufficient Student Response
___Insufficient Support
_____
(Specify)

No___

Why not? (What were the barriers?)

___1. No Need
___2. Lack of Information
___3. Already Implemented
___4. School Personnel
___5. Money
___6. Time
___7. Other_____
(Specify)

b) How would you rate the course emphasis on this topical area? (circle one)

Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
1	2	3

5. Identifying and Analyzing Career Clusters

a) Have you implemented these concepts in your program?

Yes___

Do you feel this helped your program?

Yes___

Who did it help?

___Parents
___Student
___Myself
___Other School Personnel

No___

Why not?

___Insufficient Time
___Insufficient Funds
___Insufficient Student Response
___Insufficient Support
_____
(Specify)

No___

Why not? (What were the barriers?)

___1. No Need
___2. Lack of Information
___3. Already Implemented
___4. School Personnel
___5. Money
___6. Time
___7. Other_____
(Specify)

b) How would you rate the course emphasis on this topical area? (circle one)

Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
1	2	3

6. Developing and Sequencing Instructional Modules

a) Have you implemented these concepts in your program?

Yes___

Do you feel this helped your program?

Yes___

Who did it help?

___Parents
___Student
___Myself
___Other School Personnel

No___

Why not?

___Insufficient Time
___Insufficient Funds
___Insufficient Student Response
___Insufficient Support

_____ (Specify)

No___

Why not? (What were the barriers?)

___1. No Need
___2. Lack of Information
___3. Already Implemented
___4. School Personnel
___5. Money
___6. Time
___7. Other_____ (Specify)

b) How would you rate the course emphasis on this topical area? (circle one)

Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
1	2	3

7. Analyzing Instructional Materials

a) Have you implemented these concepts in your program?

Yes___

Do you feel this helped your program?

Yes___

Who did it help?

___Parents
___Student
___Myself
___Other School Personnel

No___

Why not?

___Insufficient Time
___Insufficient Funds
___Insufficient Student Response
___Insufficient Support

_____ (Specify)

No___

Why not? (What were the barriers?)

___1. No Need
___2. Lack of Information
___3. Already Implemented
___4. School Personnel
___5. Money
___6. Time
___7. Other_____ (Specify)

b) How would you rate the course emphasis on this topical area? (circle one)

Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
1	2	3

8. Providing Reinforcement and Feedback

a) Have you implemented these concepts in your program?

Yes___

Do you feel this helped your program?

Yes___

Who did it help?

___Parents
___Student
___Myself
___Other School Personnel

No___

Why not?

___Insufficient Time
___Insufficient Funds
___Insufficient Student Response
___Insufficient Support

_____ (Specify)

No___

Why not? (What were the barriers?)

___1. No Need
___2. Lack of Information
___3. Already Implemented
___4. School Personnel
___5. Money
___6. Time
___7. Other_____ (Specify)

b) How would you rate the course emphasis on this topical area? (circle one)

Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
1	2	3

9. Modifying the Learning Environment

a) Have you implemented these concepts in your program?

Yes___

Do you feel this helped your program?

Yes___

Who did it help?

___Parents
___Student
___Myself
___Other School Personnel

No___

Why not?

___Insufficient Time
___Insufficient Funds
___Insufficient Student Response
___Insufficient Support

_____ (Specify)

No___

Why not? (What were the barriers?)

___1. No Need
___2. Lack of Information
___3. Already Implemented
___4. School Personnel
___5. Money
___6. Time
___7. Other_____ (Specify)

b) How would you rate the course emphasis on this topical area? (circle one)

Too Little Appropriate Too Much

10. Monitoring and Evaluating Student Progress

a) Have you implemented these concepts in your program?

Yes___

Do you feel this helped your program?

Yes___

Who did it help?

___Parents
___Student
___Myself
___Other School Personnel

No___

Why not?

___Insufficient Time
___Insufficient Funds
___Insufficient Student Response
___Insufficient Support

_____
(Specify)

No___

Why not? (What were the barriers?)

___1. No Need
___2. Lack of Information
___3. Already Implemented
___4. School Personnel
___5. Money
___6. Time
___7. Other_____
(Specify)

b) How would you rate the course emphasis on this topical area? (circle one)

Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
1	2	3

11. Conducting a Learner Follow-Up Survey

a) Have you implemented these concepts in your program?

Yes___

Do you feel this helped your program?

Yes___

Who did it help?

___Parents
___Student
___Myself
___Other School Personnel

No___

Why not?

___Insufficient Time
___Insufficient Funds
___Insufficient Student Response
___Insufficient Support

_____
(Specify)

No___

Why not? (What were the barriers?)

___1. No Need
___2. Lack of Information
___3. Already Implemented
___4. School Personnel
___5. Money
___6. Time
___7. Other_____
(Specify)

b) How would you rate the course emphasis on this topical area? (circle one)

Too Little	Appropriate	Too Much
1	2	3

Part C.

1. Indicate how this course helped you in working with the following groups: (circle one)

	Helped a Great Deal	Helped Some	Did Not Help
Special Needs Students	1	2	3
Other Students	1	2	3
Parents	1	2	3
Administrators	1	2	3
Counselors	1	2	3
Special Needs Staff	1	2	3
Remedial Staff	1	2	3
Other Teachers	1	2	3
Other _____ (Specify)	1	2	3

2. What do you feel were voids in this course?

3. What suggestions do you have to help us improve this course?

4. Rate your change in attitude toward working with special needs students as a result of this course. (circle one)

1	2	3	4	5
Highly Negative	Somewhat Negative	No Change	Somewhat Positive	Highly Positive

Please describe these changes.

5. What further training do you feel you need in the area of Vocational Special Needs?

APPENDIX B

College of Education

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
TWIN CITIES

Minnesota Research and Development Center
Department of Vocational and Technical Education
145 Peik Hall
159 Pillsbury Drive S.E.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

April 13, 1978

Dick Smith
1000 - 26th Avenue S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55414

Dear Dick:

We are in the process of conducting a follow-up study of the VoEd 5-111, Special Topics in Instruction: Working with Special Needs Students, course you participated in last summer (summer term II). This study is designed to help us evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the course; and to make improvements in the course structure and content for future offerings.

Thus, we would appreciate it if you would please fill out the enclosed questionnaire and return it to us in the self-addressed, stamped envelope. Your response is very important to us in improving upon our efforts.

Please return the questionnaire by Friday, April 21, and thank you in advance for your consideration and assistance. We look forward to your response and hope all has gone well for you since last summer.

Sincerely,

Tim L. Wentling
Terry A. Jensen
Laurie M. Peak
Rocco P. Russo

TLW:mms

Enclosures

APPENDIX C

Sample Script to be used for Follow-Up by Phone

1. Dial number.
2. When someone answers, say:

   "Hello, my name is _____. I am calling from the (institute's name). I would like to speak to (student's name)."
3. If the student is not there, say:

   "We are very interested in talking to (student's first name) in regard to an evaluation study we are conducting pertaining to a class he/she has taken. Is there a time when we could get in touch with him/her?"
4. If the student answers, say:

   "I am callimg from (institution's name). We are conducting an evaluation study on the (class title) which you have taken, and we would like to ask you some questions at this time. Would you mind helping us out? Your answers are strictly confidential."
5. If the student says he/she does not want to answer these questions, say:

   "Thank you for your time. Goodbye."
6. If the student is willing to answere these questions, say:

   "Thank you for helping. The questions are fairly short and we should be finished in fifteen minutes."

   (Then ask the questions on the questionnaire--be certain to accurately record the student's responses.)
7. After completing the questionnaire, say:

   "Thank you again for helping us. Your help will aid us in planning and evaluating the (course's title). Goodbye."

APPENDIX D

College of Education

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
TWIN CITIES

Minnesota Research and Development Center
Department of Vocational and Technical Education
145 Peik Hall
159 Pillsbury Drive S.E.
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

May 1, 1978

Dick Smith
500 Indiana Avenue North
Golden Valley, MN 55422

Dear Dick:

Within the past two weeks you received a letter from us and a questionnaire on the Vo-Ed 5-100 course "Working with Special Needs Students" that we asked you to complete. Unfortunately, we have not yet received your questionnaire. This information is very important in planning the course structure and content to best serve students in future offerings.

Thus, we would appreciate it if you would please fill out the enclosed questionnaire and return it to us as soon as possible in the self-addressed, stamped envelope. If you have completed and returned the first questionnaire in the last few days, please disregard this letter.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Laurie M. Peak
Project Assistant

LMP/mms

Enclosures